



RE: Support for Article 17: "Right to Pet Companionship"

April 19, 2024

The Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the Animal Legal Defense Fund, and Animal Rescue League of Boston are writing to ask for your support for Article 17 on the warrant for town meeting. This Article (which has now been revised to address concerns raised by Town Counsel and the Select Board) would require certain rental agreements to permit residents to own a common household pet, or to have a common household pet present in the dwelling.

We have reviewed the proposed bylaw and the federal Fair Housing Act, and don't believe there is a conflict with Article 17. However, to address the concerns raised, we have amended the scope of the measure by removing condominiums. The proposed revised draft exempts all owner-occupied two-family and three-family housing, in addition to the exemptions that were already included in the original draft.

The housing shortage crisis affecting every community in Massachusetts is exacerbated for families with animals. Often, owners are forced to surrender a family pet because they cannot find inclusive housing. Nearly three in four renters have pets. But others are forced to relinquish their pets to shelters, ripping those families apart. Some people choose homelessness rather than separation from their four-legged family members.

Being forced to choose between a beloved pet and a safe home has detrimental impacts on people's physical health and emotional well-being, not to mention that it contributes directly to higher intake rates at animal shelters of healthy, adoptable dogs and cats each year. Shelter Animals Count (www.shelteranimalscount.org) tracks data on animals in shelters across the country. The organization found the number of cats and dogs euthanized and that died in shelters increased nationwide in 2023 by 15% compared to 2022, and by 29% compared to 2021. In Massachusetts, the increase was 5% compared to 2022 and 18% compared to 2021. Policies that permit pets in housing help reduce the number of homeless animals.

According to the National Council of Pet Population Study & Policy, "moving" is the most-cited reason people give for surrendering their animals to shelters, with "landlord issues" close behind. Our Massachusetts shelters similarly find these reasons just as prevalent.

The state of California is currently working to address the housing crisis there by considering a state-wide policy measure similar to Article 17. Just last week, this proposed legislation received a favorable vote of 8-1 out of the Judiciary Committee.

Pet owners make very good renters: a study shows that the average length of tenancy of renters with pets is more than twice that of renters without pets. Another study found that, statistically, pet owners do no more damage to rental units than people who don't own pets. A poll conducted by the Humane Society of the United States showed that 35% of people without pets would own one if their rentals permitted it.

Approximately two-thirds of pet dogs in the U.S. are 25 pounds or more and about half of them are mixed breeds. Since 2008, Massachusetts has recognized that breed-restrictive policies are ineffective and harmful. We encourage any relevant rules to recognize this and to consider an individual dog's behavior and history rather than arbitrary factors like a dog's size, weight, or breed. We appreciate Arlington's recognition of the special role pets play in our families and the consideration of pet companionship by expanding pet-inclusive housing in town.

Sincerely,

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